

Reivers and Relatives: Ancestors along the Anglo-Scottish Border

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Where are the Borders?

The Scottish called this region “The Borders” while the English called it the “Border” and it specifically meant the frontier with Scotland.

George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London: Pan Books, 1972), 20.

“The Anglo-Scottish Border follows a line roughly south-west to north-east, from the Solway Firth to Berwick-upon-Tweed, roughly along the Cheviot Hills.”

“It is a land of bare, bleak, and wildly beautiful moorland, upland, wooded valley and peat bog.”

Matthew Hartley, “The Bloody Borders: 16th century Anglo-Scottish Border Reiving”

Jean le Bel in 1327 “described the [north/border] country as ‘wild country, full of wastelands and great hills and very impoverished, save for livestock.’”

Andy King, “The Anglo-Scottish Marches and the Perception of ‘The North’ in Fifteenth-Century England,” *Northern History* 49:1 (March 2012): 38.

The Borderers

“Being at home in the desolate hills of Border sheep farms is the mark not only of those who live and work on them; it is also a dimension of the identity and distinctiveness of the Scottish borderlands.”

John Gray, “Open Spaces and Dwelling Places: Being at Home on Hill Farms in the Scottish Borders,” *American Ethnologist* 26:2 (May 1999): 441.

There “were many writers in the south of England in the winter of 1460-1461 who regarded northerners as ravaging brigands, and a threat to civilization.”

Andy King, “The Anglo-Scottish Marches and the Perception of ‘The North’ in Fifteenth-Century England,” *Northern History* 49:1 (March 2012): 38.

The history of the border country is “violent and tragic” with over 700 years of bloodshed.

Cumbria and the Lake District: the border wars guide, 1.

The people on both sides of the border “form a distinct and separate cultural and social bloc which is apart from the rest of the British people.”

George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London: Pan Books, 1972), xvi.

The Borders have been called “The beautiful valleys full of savages.”

George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London: Pan Books, 1972), 21.

The border region between Scotland and England has been a melting pot since before The Middle Ages. According to James Leyburn, author of *The Scotch-Irish*, the Lowland Scots were a mixture of eight main groups –

- Picts
- Gaelic Scotti
- Brythonic Celts
- Irish emigrants
- Angles
- Saxons
- Norse

Descendants of the soldiers who manned the frontier forts of Roman Britain.

All these groups became, collectively, the ancestors of the Border Reivers.

Border Revivers at <https://www.geni.com/projects/Border-Reivers/177>, p. 4

The Debatable Land

“The debatable land was an area of 20 miles long by 8 miles wide between the realms of Scotland and England that belonged to neither crown.”

The Border Reivers (BBC)

The Debatable Lands extended from the Solway Firth near Carlisle to Langholm in Dumfries and Galloway.

Debatable Lands , 1.

The Debatable Land was “the very hub of the Border country.”

George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London: Pan Books, 1972), 236.

Reivers and Reiving

The continued violence and “militarization of the Marches, while the rest of England became steadily less militarized, resulted in an increasing cultural divide” between the two.

Andy King, “The Anglo-Scottish Marches and the Perception of ‘The North’ in Fifteenth-Century England,” *Northern History* 49:1 (March 2012): 49.

The Riding Clans of the Scots Borders have “a wild and bloody history.”

The Riding Clans were also known by other names: Borderers, Raiders, the Steel Bonnets, and Reivers.

Robert Bell, “‘Sheep Stealers from the North of England’: The Riding Clans in Ulster,” *History Ireland* 2:4 (Winter 1994): 1.

A reiver was described as “a professional rustler and guerilla soldier, skilled in the art of raiding, tracking and ambush. He was a fine light horseman but was also prepared to murder remorselessly and to run large scale protection rackets, giving the words 'blackmail', 'bereaved' and 'gang' to the English language.” Border Revivers at <https://www.geni.com/projects/Border-Reivers/177>

The Reiving Life

"The reivers were both English and Scottish and raided both sides of the border impartially, so long as the people they raided had no powerful protectors and no connection to their own kin.

Border Revivers at <https://www.geni.com/projects/Border-Reivers/177>, 5.

"The border reiver came from every class, and from both sides of the England/Scotland border."

The Border Reivers (BBC), 2

"From autumn to spring, when the nights were long, was the season for raiding; the summer months were for husbandry, and although raiding occurred then also, it was less systematic. Tillage took place in spring and summer, and the crops were mainly oats, rye and barley, but the main effort went into cattle and sheep raising."

Night-time was the most popular time to raid... The Scott family had a slogan, "There'll be moonlight again."

George MacDonald Fraser, The Steel Bonnets: The story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers (London: Pan Books, 1972), 35 & 70.

Raids were made, not in the name of Scotland or England, but in the name of their family or clan to which their true allegiance lay. As one harassed Border official put it, "They are people that will be Scottish when they will and English at their pleasure"

The Border Reivers, http://www.sorbie.net/border_reivers.htm, 2.

The Riding Clans

"All the family names of the Border Reivers, whose first allegiance was to their family's surname, are on a list kept in Carlisle, on the English side of the border."

"From surviving documents such as court and property records and tenure agreements, researchers have identified 74 family names from that region in the 16th and 17th centuries."

Graham Heathcote, "What's in a Name? Allegiance, for Border Reivers," Los Angeles Times, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-02-11/news/mn-34692_1_border-reivers

Reivers by Name

The 74 family names in surviving documents about the Border Reivers:

Archbold, Armstrong; Beattie, Bell, Burns
Carleton, Carlisle, Carnaby, Carrs, Carruthers, Chamberlain, Charlton, Charleton,
Collingwood, Crisp, Croser, Crozier, Cuthbert
Dacre, Davison, Dixon, Dodd, Douglas, Dunne; Elliot
Fenwick, Forster [also Foster]; Graham, Gray
Hall, Hedley, Henderson, Heron, Hetherington, Hume
Irvine, Irving; Johnstone (Johnson); Kerr; Laidlaw, Little, Lowther
Maxwell, Milburn, Musgrove; Nixon, Noble; Ogle, Oliver; Potts, Pringle
Radcliffe, Reade, Ridley, Robson, Routledge, Rutherford
Salkeld, Scott, Selby, Shaftoe, Simpson, Storey
Tailor, Tait, Taylor, Trotter, Turnbull
Wake, Watson, Wilson, Woodrington; Yarrow, Young

Graham Heathcote, "What's in a Name? Allegiance, for Border Reivers," Los Angeles Times, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-02-11/news/mn-34692_1_border-reivers

Border Families

EAST MARCHES

England

Gentlemen - Fosters, Selbies, Graies, Strouders, Swiners, Mustians.

Surmames-Johnsons, Vardes (Wards), Ourdes, Walisses (Wallaces), Stories, Armestranges, Dunnes, Flukes.

Scotland

Gentleman - Humes, Trotters, Bromfields, Dixons, Craws, Crinstons (Cranstons).

MIDDLE MARCHES

England

Gentlemen - Ogles, Fenickes (Fenwicks), Hernes (Hérons), Withringtons (Widdringtons), Medfords, Shafters (Shaftoes), Ridleis, Carnabies.

Surnames in Redesdale (Northumberland): Halls, Hedleys, Andersons, Potts, Reades, Dunnes, Milburnes.

Surnames in Tindale (Tynedale-Northumberland): Charletons, Dodds, Milbornes, Robsons, Yarcas, Stapiltons.

Scotland

Gentlemen of East Tividale (Teviotdale): Carrs, Yongs (Youngs), Pringles, Burnes, Davisons, Gilcrites (Gilchrists), Tattes (Tates).

Gentlemen of Liddesdale:

Rudderfords (Rutherfords), Carrs (Kerrs), Dowglasses (Douglasses), Trombles (Turnbells), Scottes, Piles, Robsons, Halls, Olivers, Ladlers (Laidlaws), Armstrongs, Elwoods (Elliot), Nixons, Crosers (Crosiers), Turners, Fosters.

WEST MARCHES

England

Gentlemen - Musgraves, Loders, (Lowthers), Carwennes, (Curwins), Sawfeldes, (Salkelds).

Surnames - Graemes (Grahams), Rutlitches (Routledges) Armestranges, Fosters, Nixons, Tailors, Stories.

Scotland

Gentlemen - Maxwells, Johnsons, Urwens (Irvines), Grames (Grahams), Bells, Carlills (Carlyles), Battisons (Beaties), Littles, Carruders (Carruthers).

<http://www.reivershistory.co.uk/reiver-names.php>

If your surname is among the following your ancestors were almost certainly nefarious Border raiders:

Armstrong, Nixon, Elliot, Scott, Johnston, Maxwell, Bell, Hall, Charlton, Milburn, Dodd, Robson, Graham, Noble, Irving, Irvine, Routledge, Forster, Rutherford, Croser, Musgrave, Dacre, Carleton, Ridley, Salkeld, Clifford, Kerr, Turnbull.

If your surname is among the following your ancestors were among the victims or followers of the bandits:

Little, Tweddle, Tailor, Taylor, Hetherington, Barnfather, Skelton, Tordiff, Tremble, Hodgson, Henderson, Story, Davison.

<http://www.edgeguide.co.uk/cumbria/borderwars.html>

The "Riding Clans" or "Border Reivers" of the Anglo-Scottish borders were, like the Highlanders, organized into clans led by a clan chief. These clans were not of Gaelic origin.

Chris Thompson, "The Riding Clans of the Anglo-Scottish Borders"

The Riding Clans – Alliances and Feuding

“Relationships between the Border clans varied from uneasy alliance to open ‘deadly feud.’”

Border Revivers at <https://www.geni.com/projects/Border-Reivers/177>, 5.

There was a code of honor that was central to Border law.

“...in the clannish world of the Reiver, a killing could provoke a blood feud which could last for years.”

Legacies: The Border Reivers, 4 & 3.

Alliances and Feuds among the Riding Clans:

Armstrongs allied with Croziers, Elliots, Grahams, and Nixons; feuded with Bells, Johnstones

Bells Allied with Johnstones; feuded with Grahams, Irvines

Forsters/Fosters allied with Humes

Grahams allied with Maxwells; feuded with Bells, Carlisles, Irvines, and Musgraves

Johnstones allied with Bells; feuded with Armstrongs, Elliots, and Maxwells

Kerrs feuded with Collingwoods and Scotts

Scotts feuded with Elliots and Kerrs

While intermarriage between Scots and English was not allowed, it happened anyway.

Few Elliots took English wives but Armstrongs married Graham and Forster/Foster girls and vice-versa. Forsters also married Humes.

Selbys married Rutherfords and Collingswoods married Halls of Teviotdale

While Reades married Armstrongs.

George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London: Pan Books, 1972), 50.

Pacification of the Borders

When James VI of Scotland became James I he embarked on a program called “Pacification of the Borders” which included purging the Border Reivers, destroying their fortified tower houses, rounding up families, punishing them, and sending them to Ireland and elsewhere.

Debatable Lands, 2.

While some English Borderers were sent to Ulster, most of those who went to Ulster were from the Scottish Marches, particularly those from the west and middle marches, “the toughest and most turbulent of the whole frontier.”

Robert Bell, “‘Sheep Stealers from the North of England’: The Riding Clans in Ulster,” *History Ireland* 2:4 (Winter 1994): 5.

“Borderers (particularly those banished by James VI of Scotland) took part in the plantation of Ulster becoming the people known as Ulster-Scots (Scotch-Irish American/Scotch-Irish in America). Reiver descendants can be found throughout Ulster with names such as Elliot, Armstrong, Beattie, Bell, Hume and Heron, Rutledge, and Turnbells amongst others.”

Border Revivers at <https://www.geni.com/projects/Border-Reivers/177>, 6.

Sources and Websites for Research

www.familysearch.org
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
www.nls.uk
www.nrscotland.gov.uk
www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk

www.bordersfhs.org.uk
www.safhs.org.uk

For Further Reading

Robert Bell, "Sheep stealers from the north of England': the Riding Clans in Ulster," *History Ireland* 2:4 (Winter 1994) as found at <http://www.historyireland.com/early-modern-history-1500-1700/sheep-stealers-from-the-north-of-england-the-riding-clans-in-ulster-by-robert-bell/>

Border Reivers at <https://www.geni.com/projects/Border-Reivers/177>

"The Border Reivers," http://www.sorbie.net/border_reivers.htm

George Douglas, *A History of the Border Counties: Roxburgh, Selkirk, Peebles* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 19--?).

George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London: Pan Books, 1979).

John Gray, "Open Spaces and Dwelling Places: Being at Home on Hill Farms in the Scottish Borders," *American Ethnologist* 26:2 (May 1999):440-460.

C. L. [Catherine Laura] Johnstone, *Historical Families of Dumfriesshire and the Border Wars* (Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1888).

Andy King, "The Anglo-Scottish Marches and the Perception of 'The North' in Fifteenth-Century England," *Northern History* 59:1 (March 2012): 37-50.

Jean Lang, *The Border Reivers* (Bruceton, WV: Unicorn Limited, 1926).

John M. Todd, "The West March on the Anglo-Scottish Border in the Twelfth century, and the Origins of the Western Debatable Land." *Northern History* 43:1 (March 2006): 11-19.

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